In March 1559 a Protestant layman named Adriaen de Kuyper appeared in Emden, in East Friesland, and presented himself before the consistory (the weekly meeting of the ministers and elders) of the local Reformed church. He came from Breda, where since the previous year he had been part of a small secret evangelical community; indeed it was this congregation which had despatched him to Emden, in order that he might be trained to act as their minister. But it was not for this purpose that Kuyper now came to ask the consistory's help. Kuyper had brought with him to Emden a couple of small tracts which he had written in Breda, directed against the local Anabaptists. He now wished to have them published, but since he had some doubts about his own theological gifts, he came first to the consistory for advice. The response was encouraging. The assembly agreed that the minister, Marten Micron, should look the works over and advise on any necessary revisions, and that they would then help to see them through the press.¹

For the student of early Dutch Calvinism this incident is interesting in a number of ways. On one level it illustrates the dependence of the embryonic communities in the Netherlands on help from the exile churches, in this case Emden. The mother church in East Friesland dealt frequently with cases of this sort, where evangelical congregations in the Netherlands looked to it for help, be it with money or ministers, advice or encouragement; this indeed was its principal function in the years before the outbreak of the Dutch Revolt. But the particularly striking aspect of this case lies in the object of Kuyper's literary activities: not directed, as one might expect, against the Catholic hierarchy, but against another dissident group, the local Anabaptist community. Here, in a nutshell, was the dilemma for the early Dutch Reformed Church. Initially, of course, their efforts had to be directed against the Catholic Church, still the dominant religious force in their homeland. But at the same time mainstream Protestant

groups were always aware that theirs was not the only challenge to the Roman hierarchy: Anabaptism, in particular, exercised a tenacious hold over the nascent evangelical movement within the Netherlands. With the advantage of a thirty-year start on the Reformed churches it had put down firm roots, and developed an extensive following, particularly in the Dutch-speaking provinces. This was a matter of great concern to the Dutch reformers, who differed profoundly from the Anabaptists on important points of doctrine, and were deeply suspicious of the social implications of much of their teaching.

For this reason the struggle against Catholicism in the Netherlands was only one aspect of the reformers’ task in the years before and during the Dutch Revolt. They also had to wage a simultaneous battle for supremacy within the evangelical movement. Just how much importance they attached to this ‘second front’ can be seen if we examine the activities of the church at Emden during these years, particularly in the decade before the establishment of a Calvinist church in the Netherlands. One would imagine that the campaign to evangelize the Netherlands would take top priority; but, in fact, the struggle against the Anabaptists took up much of the Reformed ministers’ time and energies. It was a struggle they waged with all the weapons at their disposal, be it literary persuasion, ecclesiastical sanctions or help from the lay authorities. The results of their prolonged campaign were somewhat mixed. The radical groups proved extremely stubborn opponents and to the end of the century maintained a strong presence in East Friesland. But the conflict is not for that reason of any less interest; on the contrary, it will be argued here that the struggle against the sectaries had a lasting effect on the shape and direction of Dutch Calvinism. Certainly the effects of the conflict between the two groups were felt far outside the province.

It is not difficult to see why the Anabaptist challenge should have been a particular preoccupation for the leaders of the church in Emden. For, while East Friesland had been one of the first German princely states to convert to the Reformation, it also enjoyed an enviable reputation as a safe haven for religious dissidents of all persuasions. This tolerant tradition, together with its geographical proximity to the Netherlands, ensured that East Friesland would play a prominent role in the early history of Dutch Anabaptism. Melchior Hoffman found a refuge here after his summary expulsion from Holstein; for a time he made Emden the centre of his ministry, on one occasion baptizing three hundred new converts at a spontaneous ceremony outside the doors of the Groote Kerke. After his departure and subsequent incarceration a new generation of leaders emerged, for

---


3 Krahn, Dutch Anabaptism, 96.
CALVINISTS AND ANABAPTISTS

whom East Friesland was again an important point of contact. Menno Simons, Dirk Phillips and David Joris all lived or worked here between 1536 and 1544, and Menno and Joris both built up a considerable local following.4

By this time the extent of Anabaptist influence in the province was causing some concern among the local lay and ecclesiastical hierarchy. In 1530 the reigning count of East Friesland, Graf Enno, issued a first order against the radical sects, but neither this nor a further decree of 1535 enforcing infant baptism seem to have had much effect.5 A decade later, the local minister, Hermannus Aquilomontanus, was making frequent references to the problems posed by the Anabaptists in his letters to the Zürich reformer Heinrich Bullinger.6 According to Aquilomontanus, the Anabaptists in and around his parish of Oldersum were both numerous and well-organized: not only were they able to hold their own regular services in competition with the local church, they also offended the minister by openly criticizing the church’s practices and ridiculing his preaching. More ominously, from the point of view of the local authorities, East Friesland’s reputation as a haven for dissidents had now spread as far as the imperial court at Brussels. In 1543 an emissary was despatched, together with a sharply-worded letter, to call Countess Anna to order.7 This imperial intervention at last stimulated determined measures to combat the influence of Anabaptist groups within the province. The superintendent of the local church, the distinguished Polish reformer John a Lasco, was encouraged to take the matter in hand, and he wasted no time in seeking out the leaders of the movement to challenge their beliefs and practices. The result was a series of formal debates, first with the followers of David Joris and then with Menno in person, at which doctrinal differences between the Anabaptists and the local church were discussed. At this stage the discussions remained at a fairly friendly level, partly because Lasco personally was opposed to any coercion. Thus, when a second letter from the imperial government in 1544 provoked an order summarily expelling all sectaries from the province, Lasco intervened to moderate the edict’s effects. Menno Simons and Dirk Phillips wisely took themselves off, but most of their followers were able to remain.8

So the situation remained with little change until the end of the decade. A second order expelling the Anabaptists was published in 1549, but it was widely suspected that this was a purely cosmetic gesture to improve relations with the Emperor; certainly this was the

5 J.P. Müller, Die Mennoniten in Ostfriesland (Emden, 1887), 17-18.
7 Müller, Mennoniten, 20-1.
impression of Charles V’s local correspondent, who reported that sectaries were as numerous as ever.9 Moreover, the Anabaptists’ most determined opponent, John a Lasco, had also been forced to depart, as a result of the Countess Anna’s reluctant acceptance of a Lutheran church settlement in the wake of Charles’s victory in the Schmalkaldic War and the enforcement of the Augsburg Interim. A new phase in the struggle with the Anabaptists was forced to await Lasco’s return to Emden in 1554. Now, however, the conflict took on a sharper edge, for the situation outside Emden had moved on quite significantly since Lasco’s departure.

Lasco had spent the intervening years in London, where the experience gathered as superintendent of the Emden church was put to good use in the organization of a new exile congregation, substantially modelled on his Emden community.10 When this church in turn was disbanded in 1553 on the accession of the Catholic Queen Mary, many of its more prominent members accompanied Lasco back to Emden. The arrival of the London exiles had an important impact in Emden. For it was during the years in London that the institutions and doctrinal forms of the exile congregations had been finally fixed: the London exiles brought with them to Emden both a strong sense of community identity and a firm commitment to a decidedly Reformed or Calvinist theology. The new arrivals were soon playing an important role in the Emden community, and it was they, particularly their minister Marten Micron, who took the lead in the renewed conflict with the Anabaptists. The sharper tone of these new exchanges also owed something to the wider international developments of the early 1550s. This was a period during which relations between the different groupings within Protestantism were deteriorating quite sharply, a harbinger of the confessional polarization of the following decade. The London refugees had themselves experienced the consequences of this development on their way from London to Emden during an arduous winter of journeying through Denmark and north Germany.11 Initial expectations of a welcome at the Danish court had been disappointed after the local Lutheran ministers had preached against them and demanded their expulsion, and the Lutheran city states of north Germany proved equally inhospitable. The final indignity came when a group of the refugees was expelled from Wismar following an indecisive but acrimonious debate with Menno, who had himself taken refuge there since his enforced departure from Emden.

These experiences undoubtedly contributed to the increasing bitterness of the conflict between the Reformed and the Anabaptists in

9 Müller, Mennoniten, 26.
Emden in the years after the return of Lasco and his colleagues. The renewal of hostilities was signalled by a prolonged exchange of controversial pamphlets, for which the ill-fated northern perambulation furnished much of the material. Both Menno and Marten Micron, who had gone from Emden to take part in the debate, published their own versions of the Wismar dispute, Micron being first to the press with his *Waerachtigh verhaal* (published at Emden in 1556). Although hardly impartial, Micron’s account does capture something of the flavour of the debate, which began amicably enough and concentrated throughout on the central disputed doctrine of the incarnation. After eleven hours of uninterrupted discussion on the first day the two parties were able to sit down to a common meal, and it was only at a second meeting ten days later that matters took an ugly turn: Menno insisted on returning to the christological arguments of the previous meeting; the discussion became heated and ended with the Reformed party being hustled from the house. While Micron’s writing obviously did not present Menno’s arguments in a favourable light, it is doubtful whether he was guilty of the misrepresentation of which Menno accused him in his swift and somewhat intemperate response, the *Gans duytljck ende bescheyden antwordt*, where Menno presented his own version of events and added some highly derogatory remarks about his opponent. To this Micron responded with a further detailed rebuttal, the *Apologie of verandtwoordinghe* of November 1558. This began by refuting Menno’s charges, before going on to a further detailed repudiation of Menno’s views on the incarnation.

By this point Micron had clearly emerged as the leading figure on the Reformed side in the struggle against the Anabaptists. Two further publications bear witness to his preoccupation during these years with the Anabaptist threat: a translation of the *De juramento* of the German reformer Wolfgang Musculus, in which Musculus discusses the Protestant attitude to the making of oaths (another issue on which the radical groups held divergent views); and secondly an account of the life and death of the martyr Jooris vander Katelyne, a former member of the London church, who after his conversion had devoted himself to visiting Anabaptist neighbours in London to persuade them of the error of their ways. Micron was at this time pre-eminent in East Friesland in his literary skill and command of theological argument

---


(particularly after Lasco’s return to Poland in 1556), but his Reformed colleagues offered him sturdy support, and one at least made an important contribution to the literature of the debate, namely, Bernhard Buwo, minister at Eilsum near Emden, the author of the *Frundtlyke thosamensprekinge . . . van de doop*. Cast in the form of a dialogue between two men, Bernhard and Johannes, one of whom doubts the efficacy of infant baptism, Buwo’s work advances a careful justification of the practice against the arguments of Menno and his followers. It was remarkable not least for its sober and rational tone, for Buwo eschewed throughout the personal abuse and name-calling that characterized most of the controversial works of the day; he also, in the tradition of John à Lasco, opposed any form of coercion, preferring to win over Menno’s adherents by persuasion. Buwo’s work enjoyed a considerable success after its first publication in 1556, going through three editions in Emden, and attracting attention beyond East Friesland: a German edition appeared at Heidelberg in 1563.

The control of the printing press in Emden gave the Reformed ministers a major advantage in their struggle against the Anabaptists. This again was a consequence of the dissolution of the London church in 1553, for among those who made the journey from London were several experienced printers, including two, Nicolas van den Berghe and Gilles van der Erve (Ctematius), who were in effect the church’s official printers. They soon resumed their operations in Emden, printing liturgies and psalm collections for the use of the church, and all of the ministers’ controversial and doctrinal works. The value of having a well-equipped and efficient local press at their disposal is borne out by the speed with which Lasco and Micron could produce their contributions to the controversies of the day. In contrast, when their Emden colleague Gellius Faber had wished to publish a treatise against Menno in 1551, he had been forced to send to Magdeburg to have it printed. The Reformed ministers reinforced their advantage by exercising a careful control over the output of the Emden presses. This was not entirely straightforward, for the Ctematius press faced stiff competition from the rival operation of Willem Gailliart and Steven Mierdman, another London exile. They, in contrast with the orthodox Ctematius, an elder of the Emden Reformed church, were happy to print material from a variety of religious traditions, including a number of the works of the German spiritualist writer Sebastian Franck and two small books by Dirk Phillips. Generally speaking,

---

17 Ibid., 75.
18 Eine Antwort Gelli Fabri deren des hilligen wordes hitmen Emden up einem bitter hömisch bref de Wedderdöper . . . (Magdeburg: Ambrosius Kerckenher, 1552.)
however, the church authorities did succeed in limiting the publication of Anabaptist works in Emden, though only at the cost of constant vigilance, and several bruising encounters with Gailliart. In 1562, for instance, he was summoned before the consistory on suspicion of having printed Menno’s *Foundationboek* (which he denied). Meanwhile, Ctematius continued to turn out Reformed propaganda against the sectaries, including, in 1560, an account of the life and death of David Joris, recently discovered to have been living under a false name in Basle. This was one of the most popular ‘sensation’ books of the period: Ctematius’s edition was one of at least seven published within two years of its first appearance in 1559.

By this time the Reformed ministers’ energetic campaign was beginning to have its effect on Emden church life. In April 1557 Marten Micron was able to report to Bullinger in Zürich that Anabaptists were returning to the church, no doubt partly as a result of his own energetic efforts, but partly, perhaps, as a result of serious divisions within the local Anabaptist movement. Towards the end of the decade the Reformed ministers scored a further notable success in securing the expulsion from Emden of the libertine leader Hendrik Niclaes, the founder of the Family of Love. Niclaes had been in Emden for twenty years, where he made a comfortable living as a merchant. He combined his business ventures with energetic proselytizing for his sect throughout East Friesland and the northern Netherlands, and it was this that finally brought him into conflict with the Emden church. In August 1557 the Reformed consistory resolved to obtain copies of his books (probably the recently-published *Spiegel der Gerechtigkeit*) and to speak to him. Niclaes succeeded in evading an encounter at this point, but by 1560 the ministers had persuaded the Council that he was a seditious influence, and he was forced to flee the town to escape arrest. His family remained, though Niclaes later claimed that his wife was so badly maltreated by the vengeful ministers that she subsequently died.

The expulsion of Niclaes was an indication that the Reformed ministers had at least succeeded in eroding the traditionally tolerant
attitude towards religious pluriformity prevalent in the town. But the ministers were well aware that combating Anabaptism required more than the exercise of strict control over the press and depriving their opponents of a platform; it also required a positive evangelical effort to win the loyalties of the local population. This they attempted in two ways. In the first place the ministers built into the institutions of the church a strong educational element. Regular preaching in the weekly services was supplemented by thorough catechismal training for all members of the community, for which purpose the ministers established a carefully-graded hierarchy of instructional works. Lasco's original catechism of 1546 was supplemented by a new shorter work, published in 1554, and the Emden church probably also made use of the brief summary of doctrine devised by Micron (ostensibly for his church at Norden), which all new members were supposed to affirm at their first communion. For the youngest children there was the small ABC-Book, containing the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and a summary of doctrine. More educated laymen had the opportunity to take part in the prophecy, a meeting where members of the community could raise matters of concern arising from the ministers' sermons. This gathering, an innovation of Lasco's, acted both as a safety-valve for criticism of the church hierarchy and as a valuable means of monitoring unorthodox opinions.

The burden of combating unorthodox views within the community was shared with the consistory, which devoted a great deal of its time to such work. Inevitably, in a town like Emden with a growing and extremely mobile population, members of the Reformed church and sectarian groups lived in close proximity, and the Reformed exiles were liable to pick up all sorts of unorthodox notions from their neighbours. So, while the ministers did everything possible in their sermons to win the sectaries over, they and their colleagues on the consistory also had to exercise constant vigilance to prevent their own community becoming contaminated. This was never an easy task, as a glance at the consistory minutes may demonstrate. Thus in July 1557 (the first month for which the minutes survive) two members were cited to answer accusations of holding heretical opinions. In the first case Severin Koperslager was suspected of being a follower of David Joris, a suspicion he managed to allay after close examination by the minister Herman Brassius. A few days later, the bookbinder John appeared, accused of being a libertine, but this charge was also dismissed after John had protested his orthodoxy.

---

27 This paralleled exactly the system established in the London church with their catechism, Micron's shorter catechism and the Korte ondersoekinghe des gheloofs, and suggests once again the strong influence of the London exiles. See Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts, ed. E. Sehling, VII, pt. i (1963), 331–2, 577.


29 Pettigree, Foreign Protestant Communities, 63. See also Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen, 352.

30 KP, 26, 30 July 1557.
The difficulty the ministers faced was that, however pernicious they thought the sectaries’ doctrines to be, among ordinary lay members of the community there was a strong seam of sympathy for groups, who, after all, shared with them a common experience of persecution. Also evident from the consistory minutes was a healthy streak of intellectual curiosity which equally militated against rigid doctrinal control. The ministers were prepared to accommodate this where doctrinal scruples were involved, as when Christoffer van Gent asked to speak with the consistory about Christ’s divinity and infant baptism. He was asked to return on Sunday after the catechism for further discussion. 31 But they drew the line at idle speculation, as when two of the community’s most prominent members wished to ventilate the question of whether Menno and Luther (a curious juxtaposition!) would be saved; they were asked not to raise issues of this sort which only caused difficulty and ill-will. 32 The most careful supervision was exercised over those who aspired to positions of responsibility in the community. Thus a plan to appoint Jebbo van Norden as schoolmaster with responsibility for catechizing the children had to be abandoned when he expressed doubts about infant baptism. 33

At this point it is worthwhile asking to what extent the tireless energy exhibited by the ministers in their struggle against the Anabaptists had succeeded in bringing the sectarian groups in Emden under control. The consistory minutes record an occasional success in reclaiming someone from the Mennonites, 34 but the wider picture is not very encouraging. When the English Merchant Adventurers arrived in Emden in 1563 they were immediately struck by the remarkable religious pluriformity in the town. One observer took a very low view of the control exercised over dissident groups: ‘they fear neither God nor the devil, and encourage Anabaptists, libertines and other damnable sects’. 35 This was an exaggeration, for the sectaries were not officially encouraged; but they were certainly still numerous and well-entrenched. Between 1563 and 1565 Leonard Bouwens, the ‘bishop’ of the local Mennonites, baptized more than 200 in Emden and the suburbs, mostly in the Faldern, the fast-growing new town outside the city walls. 36 This, it seems, is where the Anabaptist congregation met. Its continued healthy existence is also attested by further references in the consistory minutes. Thus in 1563 a member of the Reformed community was rebuked for taking alms from the

31 KP, 30 July 1557.
32 KP, 9 Aug. 1557.
33 KP, 7 Mar. 1558.
34 KP, 15 Nov. 1557.
35 Quoted Martin Tielke, Das Rätsel des Emden Buckdrucks (Aurich, 1986), 8.
Anabaptists, an interesting indication that they too operated a system of poor relief. Three years later, one Steven Mesmaker was cited before the consistory accused of being one of the leaders of the Mennonites. When he gave an evasive answer he was called back on a further four occasions during the next year, without ever being able to satisfy the consistory as to his orthodoxy.

By this time, however, the church in Emden had more pressing concerns than the case of this one obstinate individual. For the spring of 1566 saw the beginning of the *Wonderjaar*, the political and religious upheaval which marked the first stage of the Dutch Revolt and brought with it a brief flowering of religious freedom in the Netherlands. Many of the exiles living in Emden hastened back to their former homes, but within a few months it was clear that the Revolt had failed, and a new wave of emigration began. Many thousands took the familiar route north to Emden, which over the next two years experienced an unprecedented influx; the town and its suburbs were soon full to overflowing. Among the newcomers were inevitably many Anabaptists, who had as much as any to fear from the expected reprisals in the Netherlands. In Emden they joined the existing congregations which still met, more or less in secret, despite the growing official disapproval. This much is clear from an extraordinary proposal which two of the exiled Calvinist ministers brought to the consistory in December 1567. The ministers, Isbrand Balck and George Wybo, formerly of the influential Antwerp church, suggested that they might be able to infiltrate themselves into the Anabaptist congregation in order to confute their teaching. Presumably in a town like Emden the place where the unofficial churches gathered was very much an open secret.

The consistory encouraged Wybo and Balck to go ahead. At this point they were grateful for help from any quarter, for their own resources were under acute strain. Coping with the huge influx of new refugees, many of them penniless or near destitute, posed almost insuperable problems, the more so as the death of Cooltuyn in October had deprived the church of its most capable minister. In 1568 these problems were compounded by the rapidly deteriorating political situation of the church in East Friesland, with the looming threat of invasion by the avenging forces of the Duke of Alva. It is not surprising, then, that the church was not able to give the sectarian challenge the attention that many thought it merited. In October 1568

37 *KP*, 22 Feb. 1563.
38 *KP*, 27 May, 7 June 1566; 19 Feb., 12, 26, 30 Mar. 1567.
39 *KP*, 1 Dec. 1567.
a delegation of members of the former Antwerp church came to the consistory to complain that nothing was being done in the case of a member reported three months earlier as being in danger of defecting to the Anabaptist community. The case was looked into, but the following January it was reported that the Anabaptists in the Faldern were meeting more openly than ever and causing great offence to the faithful by their behaviour.\[42\]

On this occasion the consistory decided to ask the chief law officer, the Drost, to intervene; indeed, it seems that in the years after 1566 the church looked increasingly to help from the lay authorities in controlling the Anabaptist communities. In this they might have been encouraged by a new decree, issued by Graf Edward in August 1568, banning the sectaries from East Friesland, and ordering the confiscation of their goods, though this seems to have been as ineffectual as all previous official decrees.\[43\] One area, however, where co-operation between the church and lay powers does seem to have been effective was in re-establishing control of Emden’s printing presses. Here again there is evidence of a degree of slackening around 1566, apparently connected with the declining productivity of Ctematius’s strongly Calvinist printing house (he died in 1566, but his press had been running down since 1564). With the removal of his dominating presence Emden printing lost its strong sense of direction: various small operations became established in the town, and a number of unorthodox books were published. The circulation of such books under the Emden imprint soon brought protests from other churches. In September 1566 Beza wrote from Geneva to warn against the activities of the French minister Adrian Gorin, who had apparently had printed in Emden a Dutch translation of the *Hundred and Ten Considerations* of the Spanish Catholic spiritualist Juan de Valdes.\[44\] The following January the consistory had to suffer a stinging rebuke from the church in Antwerp for permitting the publication of works by Sebastian Franck, a German spiritualist writer with a large following in the Netherlands.\[45\]

Stung by these criticisms, the consistory and town authorities moved to take the matter in hand. Following the letter from Antwerp, Jan Gailliart was called in to ask if he was responsible for publishing the works by Franck. This was the beginning of a crack-down on the ‘Franckisten’, previously regarded as relatively harmless: certainly no more of his books were published in Emden from this date.\[46\]

42 KP, 28 June, 8 Oct. 1568; 24 Jan. 1569.
44 J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, *Juan de Valdés, réformateur en Espagne et en Italie* (Geneva, 1969), 63. No copies of this book have yet been identified, but a considerable correspondence relating to Gorin’s case survives in the Emden church archive.
45 KP, 1 Jan. 1567.
46 KP, 8 Jan. 1567. See also KP, 16 July 1567; 9 May 1572.
Meanwhile, the town authorities played their part, with the issuing in October 1567 of an order that no books were to be published without the permission of the Burgomeister, with whom a copy of all new books was to be lodged.\textsuperscript{47} This seems to have had its effect. Fewer works were published in Emden after 1567, all of a religiously orthodox nature. In 1569 the consistory began an investigation of Peter Bockdrucker, probably Peter de Zuttere, a free-ranging religious dissident who had brought his press to Emden around 1563 and produced a number of unorthodox works. His activities were now curtailed.\textsuperscript{48} In contrast, this same year saw the publication in Emden of one of the most effective pieces of anti-Anabaptist propaganda to emerge during the whole controversy, Heinrich Bullinger's \textit{Tegen de Wederdoopers}. The translation was by Gerard Nicolai, one of Micron's successors at Norden, who added to Bullinger's text a considerable amount of new material designed to give it a greater local relevance. Thus long sections were devoted to confuting the teaching of Menno Simons, Dirk Phillips and Adam Pastor, all teachers with a considerable local following.\textsuperscript{49}

The publication of Bullinger's work was Emden's last major contribution to the polemical debate for some years. The arrival in Emden of Menso Alting in 1574, however, brought the conflict with the Anabaptists back into the forefront of Emden church life.\textsuperscript{50} Alting, a strongly orthodox Calvinist with close links with Geneva, was appalled by the continued existence of the Anabaptist conventicles in Emden. Yet repeated requests to the Court, although endorsed by the town authorities, failed to bring the desired measures to prevent their meeting.\textsuperscript{51} The Reformed ministers were forced to resort once more to the tried and tested method of a public disputation to confute Anabaptist teaching. The opportunity arose, ironically, as a result of a meeting in Emden of Mennonite elders who were attempting to resolve their own chronic disagreements. One group of them, the Flemings, agreed to stay on and take part in a discussion with the town's ministers. The debate, held in the Gasthuis church and open to the public, lasted over three months, ranging over the whole spectrum of doctrinal disagreements between the two groups. At the close the records of the debate were signed by both sides and then published (in a version repudiated by the Mennonite participants) by the Emden

\textsuperscript{47} Tielke, \textit{Rätsel}, 15.
\textsuperscript{48} KP, 18 July 1569. On de Zuttere see Christian Sepp, \textit{Drie evangeliiedienaren uit de tijd der Hervorming} (Leiden, 1879).
\textsuperscript{50} On Alting see H. Klugkist Hesse, \textit{Menso Alting: Eine Gestalt aus der Kampfzeit der calvinistischen Kirche} (Berlin, 1928).
\textsuperscript{51} KP, 20 Jan. 1577.
This proved to be the last shot in the Reformed ministers’ polemical assault on the Anabaptist sects. In the years that followed the town ministers would become increasingly preoccupied with the growing political tension between the town and the Counts of East Friesland, culminating in the Emden revolution in 1595. The sectarian groups, meanwhile, continued to flourish. Writing in the mid-1580s, the chronicler Abel Eppens had an assessment of the religious situation that was weary familiar. Nowhere, he wrote, were there so many religions as in Emden; the town swarmed with Mennonites, Jorists, Libertines and all other sects. Eppens, a Calvinist and a firm supporter of Alting, had a simple explanation for this; greed had corrupted the town’s morals. Few of the town’s leading citizens had any interest in religion, preferring commerce to attendance at the Lord’s Supper. But it is possible to postulate other, less censorious, explanations for Emden’s enduring religious pluriformity. Despite the ministers’ best efforts, the traditional toleration of the region, celebrated by writers from Gnapheus to Emmius, proved difficult to shake. However drastic the edicts and prohibitions enacted, the authorities never proceeded to arrests and executions. Although they were hardly welcome, the sectaries were never in as much danger as if they had remained in the Netherlands. For this reason alone East Friesland continued to be a refuge for members of all suffering minorities.

What then are we ultimately to make of the thirty-year campaign waged by the ministers of the Emden church against the sectarian groups in their midst? Clearly, in Emden itself their efforts were only partially successful; although the Anabaptist groups never gained true freedom of worship they continued to enjoy a wide degree of licence. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to judge on these grounds alone and to dismiss the conflict in East Friesland as a peripheral irrelevance. On the contrary, the differences and doctrinal issues raised in Emden continued to reverberate through the Dutch Reformed Church long after it was securely established in the Netherlands. When the two synods of Dordrecht met in 1574 and 1578, the solutions they proposed to the continuing Anabaptist threat both provide distinct

echoes of the conflict in Emden. In 1574, responding to an enquiry from the ministers of the church at Walcheren, the provincial synod suggested that the ministers should attempt to infiltrate the local Anabaptist community to confute their doctrine, just as Balck and Wybo had attempted in 1567. Four years later the National Synod, among more comprehensive measures to combat the apparent growth of Anabaptist groups, urged the publication of a number of small tracts which would expose the weaknesses of Anabaptist doctrine. Among a clutch of such works that appeared in the wake of the Synod's decision were new editions of both Buwo's *Thosamensprekinghe* and Micron's first tract against Menno, the *Waerachtigh verhaal*.  

The appearance of these reprints of earlier Emden works serves to underscore the considerable impact of the polemical debate of the 1550s, both in the Netherlands and beyond. Both Calvin and Bullinger became involved in the controversy with Menno through their correspondence with Micron. Bullinger's *Contra Anabaptistica* of 1559 was stimulated in part by Micron's account of his northern difficulties, while Calvin provided Micron with a detailed rebuttal of Menno's doctrine of the incarnation for use in his *Apologie* of 1558. The arguments articulated by Calvin in this work later found their way into the expanded section on the incarnation in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, the first edition to be translated into Dutch.  

It was, however, probably through the more direct means of the circulation of Emden books in the Netherlands that the Emden church did most to form the climate of opinion in the growing Calvinist churches. It is important to remember that at the time of the first publication of Micron and Buwo's works, the evangelical communities in the Netherlands enjoyed only a precarious existence, while the exile church at Emden was at the height of its prestige and influence. Since the small evangelical communities in the Netherlands looked to Emden for help and guidance, it was natural that they would be influenced by them in their own conflicts with local Anabaptist groups. Two years before Kuyper made his trip from Breda to Emden the Antwerp church appealed to Emden for literature to use against the Anabaptists, and over the next few years the Emden consistory had also to meet appeals from churches in Holland and Friesland for ministers who might help them meet the Anabaptist challenge.
In the years before the outbreak of the Dutch Revolt the rigid divisions between the rival evangelical confessions were still far from fixed. This was particularly so in the northern Netherlands, where the almost total absence of religious persecution encouraged a greater degree of mutual toleration. It was in this context that the unyielding line taken by the Emden ministers in their dealings with the Anabaptists was so important. Not only did they articulate in their preaching and writings the incompatibility of Reformed and Anabaptist beliefs, they also practised a rigid exclusivity with regard to their own community in Emden. Faced with the ever-present challenge of the numerous local sects, the ministers threw around their own community a protective shield, using the careful examination of new members and ecclesiastical discipline to exclude any hint of doctrinal unorthodoxy. Given the naturally tolerant inclinations of ordinary layfolk, this was no easy task; their members had to be taught to think confessionally and to reject the sectaries as false spirits. But the ministers persevered, and ultimately prevailed, with a perceptible effect on the climate of opinion within the Reformed church.

Whereas, in the earlier disputes of the 1540s, John a Lasco had been able to defend individual sectaries with the casual formula 'a good and pious man, though an Anabaptist', twenty years later such a position was no longer tenable. When in 1560 Adriaan van Haemstede, then minister of the Dutch church in London, sought to defend local Anabaptists as harmless if misguided brethren, he was first asked to recant and finally excommunicated.

Mention of these important events in London is a reminder that the developments discussed above were not exclusive to Emden; a multiplicity of strands went towards the making of the Dutch Calvinist tradition. Nevertheless, the unique circumstances of the church in East Friesland, forced to compete over a period of thirty years with well-organized and well-entrenched Anabaptist groups, certainly enabled it to make its own distinctive contribution. The Emden ministers would hardly have seen things in this light. They no doubt shared with Abel Eppens a deep sense of frustration at the continuing religious pluriformity in and around Emden. But it was partly because it was forced to face up to the challenge of the Anabaptist congregations that the Emden church achieved a much clearer definition of its own beliefs and doctrine; and with it a position of towering influence among the growing Reformed congregations in the Netherlands.

---

61 *Joannis a Lasco Opera*, ed. A. Kuyper (Amsterdam, 1866), ii. 597.